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Annual ministerial review: implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to global public health

Statement submitted by IPAS, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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Statement*

As an organization focused on women's health, we welcome the theme for the 2009 ECOSOC Annual Ministerial Review on implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to global public health.

Eliminating unsafe abortion is necessary to achieve Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 5 to improve maternal health and is a major public health problem affecting over a hundred million women during their reproductive years. In a five-year review of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Programme of Action (PoA) in 1999, the United Nations issued this call to action: **"In circumstances where abortion is not against the law, health systems should train and equip health-service providers and should take other measures to ensure that such abortion is safe and accessible".** This was reaffirmed by the United Nations Commission on Population and Development in April 2009.

We can point to a number of achievements in work towards these goals. In 2003, the World Health Organization issued *Safe Abortion: technical and policy guidance for health systems*, a resource that paved the way for a number of countries to develop and disseminate national standards and guidelines on the scope and quality of abortion care. Other organizations and medical groups have issued clinical and ethical guidance on abortion, including the International Federation of Gynecology and Obstetrics (FIGO) and the International Confederation of Midwives.

Additionally, expanding women's access to high-quality post-abortion care — treatment of abortion complications linked to post-abortion family planning and other critical reproductive health services — has been an important development toward saving women's lives. Despite these improvements, much remains to be done in order to achieve MDG 5 and fulfill the ICPD PoA. Making safe abortion accessible to women worldwide can contribute significantly to achievement of the other MDGs as well. We therefore call on the global community to take the following priority actions:

- Work to change the conditions that lead to unwanted pregnancies, including poverty, lack of gender equity, sexual violence and lack of access to contraception.
- Ensure that women, especially those who are most vulnerable, have access in their communities to the full range of reproductive health care, including effective and affordable methods of contraception, post-abortion care, and safe abortion, in accordance with their human rights.
- Establish, preserve and fully implement laws, norms and regulations that make modern contraceptive methods, including emergency contraception, and safe, legal abortion accessible and available to every woman who chooses it, free from the threat of violence or coercion.
- Train more health-care providers, especially mid-level health professionals such as nurses and midwives, in clinical procedures and counselling for abortion care.

* Issued without formal editing.

- Promote multi-sectoral, South-South and South-North collaborations in the field of sexual and reproductive health and rights in order to ensure that global and local tools and experiences benefit women in all parts of the world.
- Ensure that these efforts receive sufficient financial support.